

## Iraqi Media Watch: March 27, 2006

### *Current Translations from the Iraqi Press*

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### *al-Iraqiyya*

The Iraqi TV, *al-Iraqiyya*, continues its coverage of the raid on the mosque in Sadr City as the number of deaths went up from 17 to 20. The problem is that Iraqi "mainstream" religious leaders are in a rage. Of course this will help them exploit the situation to their political advantage. They have been given the short end of the stick lately and such incidents immediately after the Samarra shrine bombing and the continued violence against the Shia by terrorists will make it very hard to ask the Shia to give any concessions (not that they should more than they have in the ideal world).

When the normally patient politicians like Jawad al-Maliki speak about the operations by American forces as "criminal," we should be alarmed. Iraqi TV showed graphic pictures of dead people whose bodies sustained more than just bullets. Eyewitnesses claim they were tortured before they were killed.

I am not vouching for the truth in this news. The role of this newsletter is to tell you what Iraqis are told, and how this will affect the public opinion.

Iraqi TV also covered a session by the city council of Baghdad which suspended all dealings with the American forces until this incident is fully investigated "and the wrongdoers are brought to justice," according to the decision read by the chair of the city council. This should not be taken lightly. The British are having a very hard time ever since the city council of Basra decided to stop cooperation with their forces.

### *Az-Zaman*

The Iraqi daily, *Az-Zaman*, reported on "a letter from President Bush to Abdulaziz al-Hakim," the head of the Shi'i list. According to the paper, President Bush "asked Hakim to replace Ibrahim al-Ja'fari as the nominee for the position of prime minister." If this report is true, the one should be replaced is the aide who suggested Bush sends this letter to Hakim. It is Sadr who holds the key to the nomination. Also, like President Bush, Ja'fari won the nomination and unlike Bush, his

coalition won the elections in a landslide. Also, this letter at this time (after the mosque raid) is like adding fuel to a raging fire.

The paper also reported on the Shi'i reaction to the raid on the Sadr City mosque. It quoted Jawad al-Maliki, the number two leader in the Da'wa Party, as saying: "The American forces and special forces under their command have committed a horrible crime when it raided the al-Mustafa Mosque and caused the martyrdom of tens and arrest of others, and the destruction of the mosque and the office of the Iraqi branch of the Da'wa Party."

The declaration issued by the Shi'i coalition stated that, "What happened was an organized crime with dangerous political and security consequences for the purpose of creating a civil war to alter the current equation during this critical time as the government is being formed."

The paper also quoted the director of the military operations in the ministry of defense, Gen. Abdulaziz Muhammad Jasim, as saying that, "the ministry of defense has no knowledge of such a raid," adding that "if our forces have participated, then the orders must have come from me, but this has not happened."

In other news, *az-Zaman* reported on the first tape purported to be made by Saddam's deputy, Izzat Ibrahim, urging the Arab League to support what he calls "the honorable resistance" and asking them to expel the "traitors," referring to the current Iraqi government. President Jalal Talabani, along with other Arab heads of states, did not participate in the summit which is currently hosted by Sudan and expected to focus on Iraq and, as usual, Palestine.

### ***al-Sabah***

Inspired by the Clintonian dictum, I announce to you all, ladies and gentlemen: The "era of big government" is coming to Iraq. Iraqis are likely to have not one, two, three, or four, but five deputies for the Prime Minister, according to the Iraqi semi-official paper, *al-Sabah*. It is amazing to have five deputies for a guy who has very little power to begin with.

Similarly, the government is likely to keep the, not one, but two ministries of education, as well as many ministries whose work can be better done by small agencies. Also, don't forget the extra-constitutional National Security Council which has 19 members and, yes, the three-member Presidential Council.

As to the number of ministries, it is based on the following (I am not kidding): The Sunni list asked for a minimum of seven ministries, the Kurds asked for a similar number (that's 14), then the Shi'i list asked for half of the ministries (are you counting? 28 ministries so far). Then they have to give ministries to the minorities (2 Turkoman, 1 Christian, and 1 for all others, to be decided by lottery). That's 32 ministries. Then they will see what jobs the ministers will have to perform (or don't perform...)

### ***Al-Sabah al-Jadid***

*Al-Sabah al-Jadid* reported on a mortar attack targeting the home of Moqtada al-Sadr in Najaf, wounding two people, not members of his family, it seems. The paper quoted Moqtada as urging his followers to "practice self-restraint."

In other news, the paper reported on terrorist attempts to pass candies stuffed with explosives or poisoned. They gave them mainly to school children in Yarmouk, a residential quarter in Baghdad.

### ***Al-Mu'tamar***

*Al-Mu'tamar*, Ahmad Chalabi's own paper, reported that the infamous Abu Ghraib prison was vacated and the prisoners were transferred to other prisons. As to the detainees in American custody, they are going to be transferred to the detention facility in the Baghdad Airport and the arrangements will be made later to transfer them to Iraqi custody.

The paper also reported on a strong letter from Ahmad Chalabi to the Australian minister of trade, concerning the scandal of Australia bribes paid to the past regime pertaining to wheat exports to Iraq. The suspension of Australian wheat imports will, according to the paper, come in favor of American exporters.

### ***Al-Adala***

*Al-Adala*, a paper close to the SCIRI (Adel Abdulmahdi and Abdulaziz al-Hakim) quoted its Editor-in-Chief, Adel Abdulmahdi as saying that he will not accept the position of prime minister as an alternate player of a back-up in case Ja'fari steps down as a nominee. He said that the only way he would accept the job would be when he receives "a strong mandate and a strong backing."

This will not happen, not if Moqtada has anything to do with it anyway.